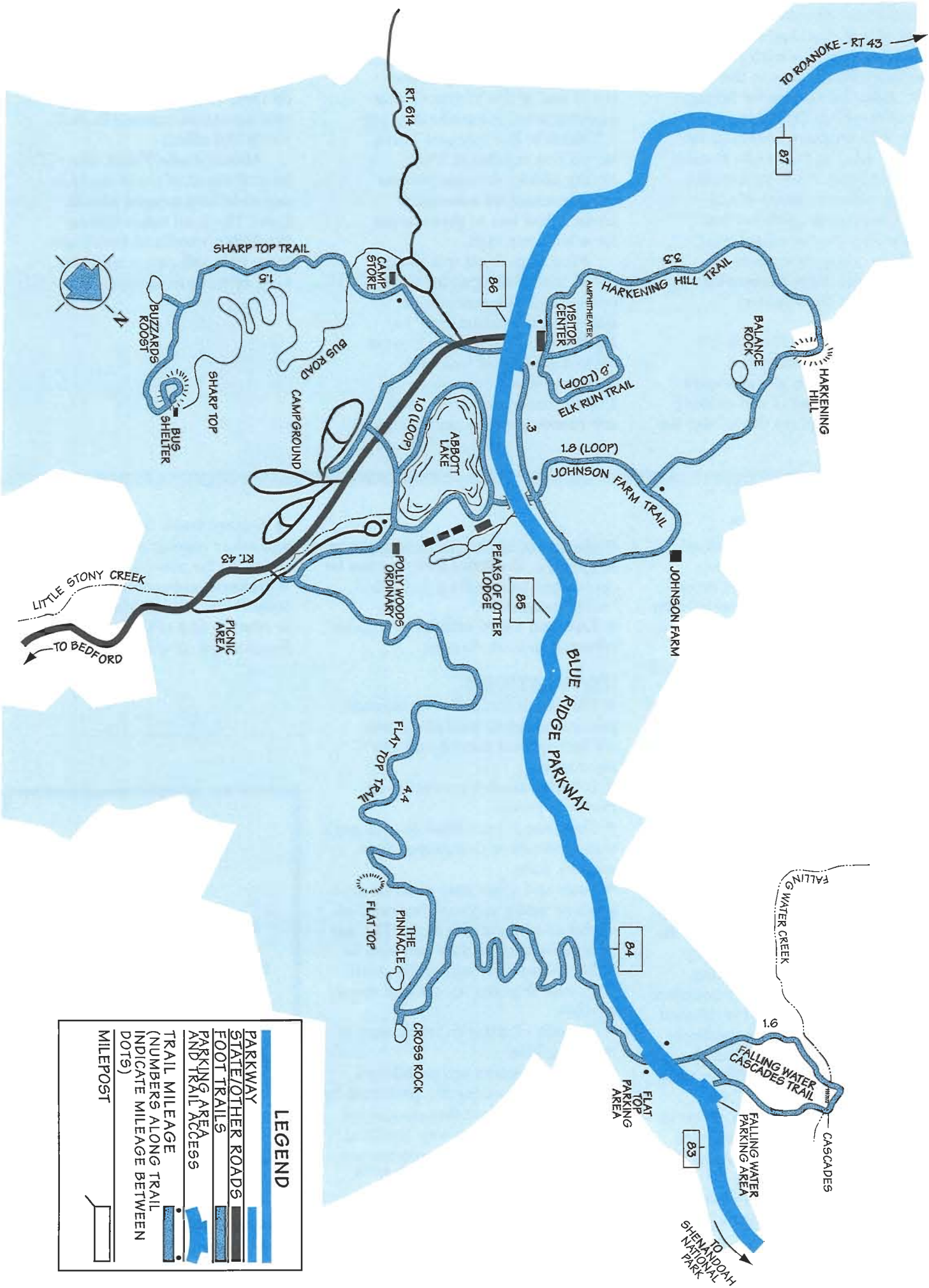


# Blue Ridge Parkway

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## Peaks of Otter Trails



# Peaks of Otter Trails

**Sharp Top Trail**, 1.5 miles to the summit, is the most popular trail and originates at the campstore across the Parkway from the Visitor Center. This is a steep and strenuous route and should be attempted only by those in good health. Drinking water should be carried as none is available at the top. The summit offers an impressive 360-degree view of the Peaks of Otter area, the Piedmont to the east, the Blue Ridge Mountains, and the Shenandoah Valley with the Alleghany Mountains to the west. Allow two hours for hiking up and one hour for hiking down. Add an extra half-hour for the spur trail to Buzzard's Roost, a series of large rock formations offering different views of the area. Concession-operated bus service (one-way or round trip) to within one quarter mile of the top is available seasonally. Hiking along the bus road is prohibited.

**Elk Run Loop Trail** is 0.8 mile and begins behind the Visitor Center. It is a moderately strenuous trail and is self-guiding with written displays describing the

forest community. For a leisurely walk, allow one hour.

**Harkening Hill Loop Trail** is 3.3 miles long. It begins behind the Visitor Center and across from the amphitheater. This woodland trail climbs to a ridge where distant views are possible. A spur path near the summit leads to Balance Rock, an immense boulder balanced on a small rock.

**Johnson Farm Trail** is a loop trail, approximately two miles long, which follows a section of the Harkening Hill Loop Trail. Beginning at the north end of the Visitor Center parking area, the trail takes you 1.1 miles to the Johnson Farm, which was started in 1852. Living history demonstrations are presented on a seasonal basis. Allow two to three hours for a leisurely visit.

**Flat Top Trail** was designated with Fallingwater Cascades Trail as a continuous National Recreation Trail in April 1982. Flat Top rises to an elevation of 4,004 feet with many scattered rock outcrops. The Pinnacle and Cross Rock are names given to such forma-

tions. On this trail, hikers can experience the changing forest ecology as they climb or descend 1,600 feet from the Parkway trail heads.

**Fallingwater Cascades Trail**, the other segment of the National Recreation Trail (see Flat Top Trail), is a loop trail which takes hikers along cascades on Fallingwater Creek with its huge rock outcrops clothed in rhododendron and large hemlocks. This trail drops 260 feet below the Fallingwater Parking Area; hikers should be prepared to climb that elevation on their return. Experiencing this mountain cascade is well worth the effort.

**Abbott Lake Trail**, the least difficult of these trails, is a one-mile loop around Abbott Lake. The trail takes hikers through a woodland forest and open field, offering a close-up view of this picturesque lake.

## IMPORTANT ADVICE

- Lock valuables in the trunk of your car or take them with you.
- Hiking shoes or boots are recommended for most trails, especially for the most strenuous ones. Steep and rocky areas and slippery stream crossings require extra attention and careful footing. Even for trails marked "easy," it is advisable to wear flat or rubber-soled shoes for comfort and good traction. Wearing sandals, "flip-flops," or high heels can result in accidents.
- Sudden changes in weather are common in these mountains. Even in mild seasons, rapid dips in temperature and unexpected thunderstorms frequently occur, and at higher elevations the wind and temperature can carry a surprising chill. Be prepared for weather changes by bringing along suitable clothing.
- For your safety and the protection of the resources, stay on established trails. Shortcutting at switchbacks causes soil erosion, disfigures the trail, and makes it difficult for other hikers to find their way. Take advantage of log walkways, steps, or other trail construction. They are there to minimize human impact on the natural environment.
- Restrooms and treated water are not available on any Peaks of Otter trails.

- Do not drink the water in streams or springs. Bacterial diseases can be contracted by drinking untreated "wild" waters.
- Lost and found articles should be reported to Park Ranger.

## REGULATIONS

- Parking is limited to designated parking areas or road shoulders. All four wheels must be off the pavement.
- Bicycles are not permitted on Parkway trails.
- Camping is permitted only in park campgrounds or designated backcountry sites.
- Dogs and other pets must be on a leash or under physical restraint at all times while in the park. The territorial instinct of dogs can lead to fights with other dogs on the trail. Dogs also frighten hikers and chase wildlife.
- Deposit all litter in trash cans or recycling bins.
- Metal detectors are prohibited.
- Natural resources are protected by federal law. Do not disturb animal and plant life in any way. Hunting, trapping and carrying weapons are prohibited. Do not interfere with animals by feeding, touching, or frightening them. Do not cut, deface,

or damage trees. Leave wildflowers and other vegetation in their natural condition for other hikers to enjoy.

- Historic resources are protected by federal law. Do not damage, deface, or remove any of these structures, furnishings, or exhibits.



**Help protect and preserve  
the Blue Ridge Parkway.  
Be alert for uncontrolled fire,  
safety hazards, accidents,  
and emergencies.**

**Please report such  
conditions by calling:  
1-800-PARKWATCH**

(1-800-727-5928)

For general Parkway  
information, call: (828) 298-0398 or  
visit [www.nps.gov/blri](http://www.nps.gov/blri) on the Internet.